



STATE OF MICHIGAN

**Family
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News Release

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Date: June 22, 2001

St. Joseph County Woman is Statewide Achiever of the Month

CENTREVILLE—The director of the Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA), Douglas E. Howard presented the agency's statewide Achiever of the Month award for June to Vivian Gonzalez of Three Rivers. The celebration was held on Friday, June 22 at the St. Joseph County Intermediate School District in Centreville.

This month's award recognizes the achievements of Vivian Gonzalez, a public assistant recipient who has demonstrated remarkable progress toward economic independence and self-improvement.

Ms. Gonzalez is the single mother of three children. She turned to the St. Joseph County FIA for assistance in May 2000. At that time she had recently moved to the United States from Puerto Rico and was having difficulty making ends meet. While she had relocated to the states to become more self-reliant she recognized that she needed to seek help to provide for her family.

(more)



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

Through the St. Joseph County FIA she received Family Independence Program benefits, Medicaid, child day care and food stamps to meet her families needs.

Vivian was determined to become economically independent. However, she had several barriers to finding employment; she had difficulty speaking English and lacked transportation.

When Vivian was referred to the Work First program she was committed to learning everything she could to improve her employment opportunities. The Work First provider, Employment Training Connections, helped Vivian prepare resumes and improve her interviewing skills. Later, when she began taking English as a Second Language classes at the adult education center in Three Rivers, Employment Training Connections provided a translator to assist her. They also supplied support services that enabled her to receive a ride to and from various locations, since she did not have a car.

Arch, Inc., the company that provided Vivian's transportation, also operates St. Joseph County's Transitional Employment program. Vivian was placed in transitional employment at TH Plastics. On May 17, 2001, after her transitional employment ended she was hired to work at the company full-time.

Despite her struggles, Vivian has maintained a determined and focused approach to life. She believes in self-sufficiency and refuses to let daily challenges deter her from her goals. Her outstanding efforts have proven to be successful. On June 23, 2001 her public assistance case will close due to earnings. She will continue to receive food stamps and transitional Medicaid, which can last for up to one year after departure from cash assistance.

Vivian Gonzalez was selected to receive the June 2001 Achiever of the Month award because of her determination to improve life for family and her motivation to become independent of the welfare system.